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THE BLIND.

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THE BLIND*

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There are many points of view from which blindness may be defined. To the physician it is a condition—the absence of sight; to the social worker or the educator it is a cause—a restriction which keeps one from full participation in the educational, employment, and recreational facilities of the community.

Roughly speaking, a child with less than one-tenth vision, or with an eye condition which makes school work unsafe if conducted in the ordinary way, is educationally blind. There is, however, a large additional group of children, with vision ranging from one-tenth to one-third, for whom special sight-saving classes must be organized if they are to receive fair treatment at the hands of the school authorities. The adult with less than one-tenth vision is so limited in his choice of occupations as to be considered vocationally blind. There are, though, many persons possessing more than one-tenth vision who are so handicapped vocationally that they require the assistance of agencies for the blind. The ratio of the blind to the general population in this country is usually estimated at about one to one thousand. The incidence of blindness varies little geographically except in districts like eastern Kentucky, southern Illinois, and southern Missouri, where the prevalence of trachoma raises the ratio to a marked degree. A recent calculation based on estimates from agencies for the blind indicates that in 1929 there were about 114,000 blind people in the country. This total is much higher than that shown by the census, first because the Census Bureau's definition of blindness is quite restricted; and second, because many blind people are overlooked. According to the census of 1920 the age distribution of blind people was as follows:

Age Group	Per Cent
Under 5 years (Pre-school)	0.7
5 to 19 years (School)	11.9
20 to 34 years (Employable but probably in need of vocational training and adjustment)	11.5
35 to 49 years (Employable)	15.6
50 to 64 years (Possibly employable, but opportunities limited by age)	20.8
65 years and over (Probably unemployable)	39.5

The group between 5 and 19 years was probably more completely reported than any other, since children in the residential schools for the blind would be easily located by the enumerators. Similarly, the group under 5 years is probably the most incompletely reported, owing to the difficulty of locating young blind children and of determining whether they are blind or not. The large proportion of blind past 50 years of age—over 60 per cent—is to be noted; many of these would be too handicapped by age and sickness to be self-supporting even if they could see. It is important that the public should distinguish between these and the young capable blind who ask only for opportunity. Age at losing sight is also an important consideration in the rehabilitation of the blind, and it is interesting to note that the Census of 1920 showed that 65 per cent of blind people lost their sight after school age had been passed.

History and Present Status. There are in the United States 54 residential schools and 21 city day schools for the blind. The three oldest schools in the country—the New York Institute for the Education of the Blind, the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind, and Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind—were organized at about the same time, 1832. These institutions are under private management, but they have received state grants almost from

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the start and the states now furnish a large share of their support. The first state school for the blind was established by Ohio in 1837. Today every state either conducts a residential school of its own or has a working arrangement by which it pays the cost of educating its blind children in a similar school in a neighboring state. Approximately 5,500 pupils are enrolled in the 54 residential schools for the blind, private and public. The first day school for the blind was organized by the City of Chicago in 1900. Since that time 20 cities have followed Chicago's lead, these schools having an approximate enrollment of 450 pupils. Special institutions of higher learning for the blind have never found much favor in the United States, but many blind men and women attend the regular colleges and universities. Through the efforts of Dr. Newel Perry, now a teacher in the California School for the Blind, New York State in 1907 established scholarships of \$300 a year to employ "readers" for blind students attending institutions of higher learning in that state. At present 21 states have similar scholarships, varying from \$100 to an indefinite amount and limited only by the appropriation and the requirement of the student.

Schools for blind children had not been long in operation before it became evident that the academic and vocational training afforded children in such schools did not solve the employment problem of the blind. Accordingly several employment institutions with boarding facilities were opened, some operated by the state and others receiving more or less state support. But as the activities of these employment institutions were quite restricted, state commissions or departments came to be organized to care for the general needs of the blind, especially adults. Twenty-six states now have such agencies, with varying scopes of service. Among the activities conducted by most state commissions is home teaching. This work is carried on usually by blind persons who call at the homes of blind adults who have never attended schools for the blind. Instruction is given in finger read-

ing and in simple manual occupations, and the blind person is helped in other ways to adjust himself to his situation.

Blindness is so definite a cause of poverty that special provision of public relief for the needy blind has long been demanded. In 1903 Illinois inaugurated special county relief for the blind. This was popularly known as a "pension." At the end of 1929 there were 21 states having such special relief laws for the blind, and efforts were being made by organizations of blind people to write similar laws on the statute books of other states. In several large cities private associations for the blind have been organized to carry on such activities as home teaching, placement work, sheltered workshops, recreation projects, and eye clinics. As a rule these associations offer little material relief, preferring to leave that function to family welfare agencies.

Owing to the limited market for books for the blind their publication has never been commercially profitable. Finger readers have, therefore, had to depend either upon philanthropy or upon public funds for their reading matter. School books for the past half century have been largely supplied by the Federal Government, operating through the American Printing House for the Blind, in Louisville. Because of the great cost and bulk of books in raised type, few blind people own them, and not many communities feel justified in establishing libraries for the blind. A few public libraries which have such collections very generously lend their books over a far larger territory than they ordinarily serve, sometimes over several states. To facilitate circulation the post-office transmits such literature through the mails free of charge. In 1907 Mrs. Matilda Ziegler, of New York City, established the *Matilda Ziegler Magazine for the Blind*, a monthly periodical which is sent free to any sightless person in the United States or Canada. A number of other secular and religious magazines have been started since. The Lions International has adopted work for the blind as one of its major activities. It publishes a magazine in braille

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for blind children and has helped to inaugurate work for the adult blind in several states.

Workers for the blind find that perhaps their chief task is finding remunerative employment for their clients. The employment field is narrowed not only by the limitations imposed by blindness, but also by the lack of confidence on the part of the seeing public in the productive powers of the blind. Employed blind people may be divided into four classes: first, those who have set up for themselves in business or in professions; second, those who are employed side by side with the seeing in factories and commercial establishments; third, those employed in sheltered workshops; and fourth, those working in their own homes under the supervision of a central agency for the blind. To the blind man with some business acumen, a commercial enterprise usually affords the best opportunity for success. These enterprises represent almost every line of business, from the management of a peanut stand to the presidency of a bank. Wherever salesmanship, personality, or executive ability are of first importance, there are to be found blind men in positions of trust. Most blind people, however, like their seeing brothers, must be wage-earners, leaving management to those with special abilities.

Until the beginning of the present century the blind man who had found work as an ordinary factory hand was rare indeed. About 25 years ago, however, Charles F. F. Campbell, an enthusiastic young worker for the blind in Massachusetts, became convinced that there were more jobs in industry which blind people could fill than there were blind people to fill them. He demonstrated his contention to a limited extent, but the employment of blind people in industry did not become widespread until the years of the World War. Most of the blind who obtained positions at that time lost them during the industrial recession about 1921. Owing to the rapid development of labor-saving machinery, to the restricting effect of insurance regulations, and to the increasing difficulty for various reasons of inducing

industry to assume responsibility for the employment of the handicapped, the number of blind people now working in factories constitutes but a small proportion of those so engaged at the close of the War.

In most large cities may be found one or two small sheltered workshops employing a dozen or more men. These shops usually operate at a loss, and the deficit is made up through either private philanthropy or taxation. The commonest activities carried on are chair caning and the manufacture of brooms, mops, rugs, and reed ware. Because blindness handicaps individual workers to a varying degree, wages are usually paid by piece rate.

Many state commissions and city associations arrange to sell the products made by the blind in their homes. In some cases the organization supplies the material and pays for the labor upon delivery of the completed work. In other instances the workers furnish their own material and the organization sells the articles, returning the amount of the purchase price to the blind workers. There is usually no charge for selling service. Articles so manufactured include dish towels, aprons, rugs, baskets, crocheted and knitted wear, and stuffed toys.

American Foundation for the Blind. In 1921 there was incorporated a national agency for the blind known as the American Foundation for the Blind. The purposes of this organization are to collect and disseminate information regarding all phases of work for the blind, to promote State and Federal legislation in behalf of those without sight, to arrange for the establishment of needed agencies for the blind throughout the country, and to assist in increasing the efficiency of work for the blind in all particulars.

International Cooperation. As the result of a conference held in Paris in April, 1929, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States adopted a common code for the publishing of braille music, so that music embossed in any of these countries will henceforth be usable by the blind in other countries. Arrange-

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ments have been made for the holding of a World Conference on Work for the Blind, which will meet in New York City in April, 1931.

Studies and Surveys. The American Foundation for the Blind has recently made a study of stand concessions operated by the blind; and also a comparative study of the braille system as published in the United States and in Great Britain, with a view to ascertaining ways in which the differences between the two systems may be reduced. Studies have also been conducted by the Sub-Committee on the Visually Handicapped of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. A survey of library work for the blind has been made, which resulted in the drafting of the Pratt-Smoot Bill, and the preparation of other plans for improving library service for the blind in this country.

Legislation Within the Past Two Years. Congress passed the Pratt-Smoot Bill authorizing the appropriation of \$100,000 annually to the Library of Congress for the maintenance of libraries for the blind throughout the United States, and the publication of books for the blind with which to stock these libraries. Florida,

Rhode Island, and Wyoming established state departments for the blind; Vermont made an appropriation which allowed the inauguration of work previously authorized; California passed a new law providing county relief up to \$600 a year to the blind; Maryland, a new law providing relief up to \$250 a year, to be administered by the Maryland Workshop for the Blind; and Nevada passed an amendment increasing the maximum of county blind relief to \$600 a year. California passed a bill establishing workshops for the blind and other handicapped persons in Los Angeles.

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